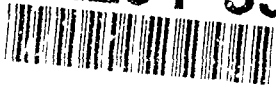


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PROJECT

A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CARTER KOREANIZATION PLAN:  
A CASE STUDY OF A BLURRED VISION

BY

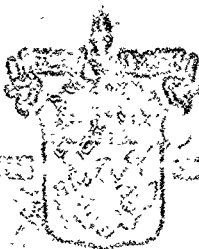
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United States Army

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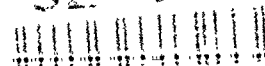
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**USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER**

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**A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CARTER KOREANIZATION PLAN:  
A CASE STUDY OF A BLURRED VISION**

**AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT**

**BY**

**Lieutenant Colonel Howard W. McMillan  
United States Army**

**Colonel Lawrence B. Goodwin, Jr.  
Project Advisor**

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# ABSTRACT

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A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CARTER KOREANIZATION PLAN:  
A Case Study of a Blurred Vision

INTRODUCTION

In May 1977, President Jimmy Carter announced plans to withdraw the remaining United States ground forces from South Korea. Discussing his decision at a news conference in which he discussed the removal and reassignment of Major General John Singlaub from his position as Chief of Staff, United States Forces Korea, who publicly opposed the withdrawal because he thought it would lead to war, the President stated:

The essence of the question is, is our country committed on a permanent basis to keep troops in South Korea, even if they are not needed to maintain the stability of that peninsula. I think it is accurate to say that the time has come for a very careful, very orderly withdrawal over a period of four or five years of ground troops, leaving intact an adequate degree of strength in the Republic of Korea to withstand any foreseeable attack and making it clear to the North Koreans, the Chinese, the Soviets, that our commitment to South Korea is undeviating and is staunch.<sup>1</sup>

The so-called *Carter Koreanization Plan* sparked considerable controversy in Northeast Asia for there was legitimate concern about the withdrawal's impact on North Korean intentions concerning the South. In fact, the reported massive North Korean military buildup within one month after the announcement came as no surprise to military

strategists<sup>2</sup> for the long-standing, overriding aims of Kim Il Sung, the capricious and bellicose leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has been to eliminate United States imperialist colonial domination, secure the development of South Korean society and achieve the country's unification in concert with the socialist forces in the northern half.<sup>3</sup>

Although the plan was never concluded as announced, it was to be a phased withdrawal of all United States ground forces (approximately 14,000 soldiers) by 1982, with the first group returning to the United States by the end of 1978.<sup>4</sup> Carter justified the proposed withdrawal with the assertion that United States forces were not needed to maintain peninsula stability; but, upon review of data revising the strength of North Korean forces, Carter suspended the withdrawal in July 1979.

In view of the historic changes that have occurred in international relations since the Carter Plan was aborted thirteen years ago, President Bush--responding to Congressional inquiry--announced a new plan for withdrawal in April 1991. Accordingly, this study contends that Carter's plan for withdrawing troops was a strategic decision influenced more by his personal views regarding human rights and his desire to win the Presidency than by an enlightened awareness of the North Korean military threat in Northeast Asia. And that, in spite of his assurances to the contrary, his plan did create regional instability.



Consequently, an analysis is offered of why Carter reached his decision and the discrepancies in his process. And, in the context of the 1990s, an assessment is made of United States strategic interests on the peninsula; the South versus North military balance; the likelihood of Sino-"Soviet" intervention if war were to occur; and, the feasibility of the Bush plan given the recent epochal changes in East-West relations and the ever increasing capability of the Republic of Korea to assume primary responsibility for its defense.

The armistice that ended the Korean War on June 26, 1953 closed an early chapter in the annals of a cold war that had started almost before the end of World War II. The Korean War---fought to a stalemate---produced almost 4,000,000 casualties (including civilians)<sup>5</sup> and enormous industrial damage and equipment losses in both North and South Korea.<sup>6</sup> Total American casualties were 32,629 killed in action; 20,617 non-combat deaths; and, 103,284 wounded in action.<sup>7</sup> The cost to American taxpayers was \$67 billion.<sup>8</sup> But the truce ended only the war; not the hostilities. And, as a result of the continued hostilities and armament of both sides, the United States entered into a (bilateral) Mutual Defense Treaty with South Korea in October 1953.

In the 23-year period, 1953-1976, it is estimated that the United States contributed more than \$7 billion in military aid<sup>9</sup> to the Republic of Korea while watching the South Korean Army become the fifth largest ground force in

the world<sup>10</sup> as well as become one of the most combat experienced through its participation in the Vietnam War from 1965-1972. Additionally, coupling its resolve to help South Korea defend against another invasion from North Korea with its interest for ensuring regional stability, the United States had maintained combat troops on the peninsula continuously since the end of the Korean War. Campaigning with a promise to reduce defense spending by 5 percent<sup>11</sup> and believing that factors now obviated the need for the continued presence of United States troops on the peninsula, it was this aspect--and more--of our foreign policy that caught candidate Carter's attention early in his campaign for president.

On January 16, 1975 a month after declaring his candidacy, Jimmy Carter announced that he favored removing all United States troops from South Korea and that he would begin the process as soon as he became President<sup>12</sup>. However, after attending a briefing at the Brookings Institute and taking a spring 1975 trip to Tokyo, a trip during which he was presented pertinent facts on the role of United States forces in Korea, and sensing that a more conservative stance on foreign policy would be beneficial to his campaign efforts, Carter began to clarify his position--moving from a policy of complete withdrawal to one of withdrawal of ground forces only.<sup>13</sup>

Carter's announcement was in keeping with his early campaign strategy to draw attention to himself as a spokesman

on national issues.<sup>14</sup> Coming on the heels of President Ford's visit to South Korea during which he assured President Park Chung Hee that he had no plans to reduce the number of remaining American troops, Carter's position was calculated to present himself as a political alternative to the Nixon-Ford Administration. Being critical of past administrations whom he thought were too reliant on the military as an instrument of American foreign policy, and too tolerant of repressive regimes such as the Park regime, Carter considered troop withdrawals to be consistent with the goals he would espouse as President.<sup>15</sup> As a warning to Park he pledged that "it should be made clear to the South Korean government that its internal oppression is repugnant to our people and undermines the support of our commitment there."<sup>16</sup> "Carter's emphasis on making the protection of human rights everywhere in the world a foundation of foreign policy reflected his own sincere moral beliefs and the accurate perception that the issue was good politics in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War."<sup>17</sup> And the passage of a 1976 law that declared it was "a principal goal of foreign policy of the United States to promote the increased observance of internationally recognized human rights by all countries" and required the Secretary of State to submit an annual report on the human-rights record of all countries receiving American assistance,<sup>18</sup> fortuitously provided a legal foundation for Carter's moralistic beliefs. The additional statement declaring that no assistance should go to any country

engaging "in a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights,"<sup>19</sup> only buttressed Carter's desire to increase the leverage in dealing with countries so identified. Accordingly, "For candidate Jimmy Carter during the 1976 campaign, the American position in South Korea was a convenient example of two wrongs which he would correct: the excessive reliance on American armed forces and complicity with a morally repugnant regime."<sup>20</sup>

Jimmy Carter became President at a time when the nation needed healing. For too long, the nation had endured the divisiveness of the Vietnam War and the trauma and embarrassment of Watergate. A Christian who felt deeply about the fraying of his country's moral fabric, he sought to remind the nation of those values inherent in its origin. With his first steps down Pennsylvania Avenue during his inaugural parade, he symbolized to his fellow citizens that his government would be open, honest, and possessive of the values that had made the United States the paradigm of freedom. Although he came into office with no significant experience in foreign policy, he proposed to offer a bold new course<sup>21</sup>--a course that would hold America up for emulation.

In his first press conferences after assuming office, President Carter reaffirmed his earlier intentions to withdraw all combat troops from South Korea. However, "if Carter expected his government's support for South Korea--more than \$400 million in aid in 1976, nearly forty thousand air and ground troops stationed on the peninsula, and an

essentially unlimited guarantee of support in the event of another invasion from the Communist North--to provide adequate leverage to impose either free elections or any other substantive reform, he faced profound disappointment.<sup>22</sup>

For many observers, the authoritarianism of President Park Chung Hee's regime in the Republic of Korea provided a test case for Carter's human rights efforts throughout the noncommunist world. Certainly there were few U.S. allies that deserved more penetrating reforms. Reasonably free elections, of which there had been arguably only two in the more than two thousand years of recorded Korean history (both conducted since World War Two, both held only in the South, both scheduled only at U.S. insistence and both seriously flawed by fraud and intimidation), had disappeared entirely after 1971, and President Park's preference for ruling by "emergency decree" had eliminated even the most superficial constitutional safeguards for those opposed to the existing government. By 1976 a spokesman for the Seoul government had proclaimed that calling for Park's resignation, or even for the rebirth of democratic processes, was legally "the same as calling for the overthrow of the Government of Korea."<sup>23</sup>

Although the majority of Americans reacted to Carter's pronouncement with dispassion, the Asian response was tumultuous. Cognizant of the withdrawal of our remaining troops from Cambodia and Vietnam and the more recent withdrawal of troops from Thailand by the Ford Administration, Korean and Japanese officials believed the Carter policy was the beginning of our final withdrawal from East Asia.<sup>24</sup> Having grown secure in the stability provided by the regional deployment of American forces, they understood the potentially ominous effect on East Asian stability.

Realizing he underestimated the reaction his intentions would elicit from the East Asian community as well as from some key members of Congress who supported keeping combat troops in Korea, Carter attempted to take advantage of Vice President Walter Mondale's goodwill trip to Tokyo in February 1977 to assuage the Japanese. Although Mondale was privately sympathetic to the Japanese position that the withdrawals would be a mistake, he was instructed by the President to simply inform the Japanese that the decision was a *fait accompli*<sup>25</sup> and that the President would entertain no discussion that the decision should be reversed.

Consequently, during his visit, the Vice President announced that "we will phase down our ground forces only in close consultation and cooperation with the governments of Japan and South Korea."<sup>26</sup> He also admitted that there was no set timetable for the withdrawal. On March 9, 1977, during the visit of the South Korean Foreign Minister, the President announced that the withdrawal would be phased over four to five years and again emphasized consultations with South Korea and Japan.<sup>27</sup>

With this explicit Presidential guidance, the basic decision document, Policy Review Memorandum (PRM) 13--still in early draft in March--was completed in April and presented to Carter with five troop withdrawal options ranging from withdrawal of all United States ground troops by 1979 to a token withdrawal at a later date. On 5 May, in Presidential Decision 12, Carter made his decision and tasking memoranda

were sent to State and Defense Departments to implement the withdrawal and complementary military assistance plans. The final decision was a threefold compromise that reaffirmed the Mutual Defense Treaty, provided for sufficient military assistance, and provided for the retention of United States air and naval forces in Korea after the withdrawal.<sup>28</sup> On May 26, 1977, Carter announced his decision and stated that Under Secretary of State Philip Habib and General George Brown would visit Seoul and Tokyo to explain the policy.

With those "consultations" promised on March 9th having been nothing more than fact sessions in which Korean and Japanese officials were informed of the policy, but not consulted, both Seoul and Tokyo were still awaiting the opportunity to participate in the discussions that would lead to a final decision when Carter announced his plan preemptively on May 26th.<sup>29</sup> Justifiably, they expressed annoyance at Carter for having made a unilateral decision--to their apparent detriment--that so gravely affected their national security.<sup>30</sup>

However, before the withdrawals could be fully implemented, Carter bowed to the internecine dissension existing among his staff--only National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski supported the withdrawal<sup>31</sup>--within Congress, and within the Department of Defense, and agreed to slow down the withdrawal in April 1978.<sup>32</sup> He suspended it temporarily in February 1979.<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding, he remained adamant for another five months that the withdrawals should

occur. But by summer, the groundswell of opposition that had evolved since he initially announced his intentions while still a candidate caused him to rethink his decision--especially in view of the revised Central Intelligence Agency estimate of North Korean strength that indicated previous estimates were at least 30 percent too low. The lack of consensus within his administration also concerned the President. After returning from a June trip to South Korea punctuated by an acrimonious meeting with President Park who vehemently expressed disagreement with the decision,<sup>34</sup> and while under fire for general weakness in meeting communist expansion during his attempt to win senate approval of the SALT II treaty,<sup>35</sup> Carter, on July 20, 1979, permanently suspended the withdrawals citing the new intelligence estimates and other factors. Carter was especially vexed by the announcement of the new estimates because he believed the timing of the announcement forced his hand.<sup>36</sup>

Some of those other factors were: (1) not only a North Korean force larger than previously thought, but one stronger in terms of armor and firepower and offensively deployed; (2) a rapid buildup of Soviet military, especially naval, strength in East Asia; (3) the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation at the end of 1978; (4) the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia; and, (5) the fall of the Shah of Iran.<sup>37</sup> All of these developments, occurring as they did, provided Carter with an education in geopolitics he had not possessed prior to his election. But,



undoubtedly, the most cogent factor was a belated realization of the breadth of consequences the withdrawal portended for regional stability. Succinctly stated:

Any U.S. withdrawal [in light of North Korean potential aggression] under such circumstances would certainly have inspired diplomatic and perhaps military shifts of incalculable magnitude throughout the region--among the Japanese, who had historically considered Korea a geopolitical dagger aimed at the home islands from the Asian mainland; among the Soviets and Chinese, who had maneuvered for decades for influence in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang; and among U.S. allies in the region from Taiwan to Singapore, none of whom could have ignored the strategic implications of a further U.S. pullout from their continent. These realities, easily listed by even the most casual observer of Asian affairs, had somehow escaped notice by the Carter campaign staff."<sup>38</sup>

Despite Carter's reversal, the damage was already done and it took a great deal of time and energy on the part of succeeding administrations to recover the lost credibility of the United States commitment to her Asian allies defense.<sup>39</sup> Coming to grips with the harsh realities of cold war politics, Carter gained an appreciation of the decision(s) made by every one of his cold war predecessors to leave combat troops on the peninsula. However valid his proposal to withdraw the troops, it was an idea whose time had not come. With particular discomfort, he was forced to capitulate.

A number of political reporters assessing Carter's foreign policy decisions during his first few months in office discerned many of his decision to be a case of Carter "...shooting from the hip and operating haphazardly without a

considered strategy."<sup>40</sup> The venerable Hugh Sidey of Time believed some of the administration's foreign policy decisions to be a function of Carter's inexperience.<sup>41</sup> Stephen Rosenfeld of the Washington Post concluded that "Carter was not elected to be a foreign-affairs president."<sup>42</sup> In Rosenfeld's view the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger achievements in foreign policy made it safe for the nation to elect a 'provincial man.'<sup>43</sup>

In Carter's defense, his plan was consistent with the 1970 Nixon Doctrine which "made it clear that countries allied with the United States, particularly those in Asia, would be expected to bear the brunt of ground combat if they were attacked by hostile forces and that the United States would rely on its air and naval power to support them."<sup>44</sup> However, Carter disregarded the fact that after the removal of the Army's Seventh Infantry Division from Korea in 1970-71, Nixon, on the advice of Henry Kissinger, backed away from removing the remaining combat division in appreciation of the fact that "United States forces in Korea were a deterrent force disproportionately greater than their relatively small size, and withdrawal of these troops will greatly impair this deterrent, with almost no discernable gain."<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that Carter found it necessary to first modify his plan then, two and a half years later, suspend it after visiting East Asia and receiving a more detailed briefing of the military threat posed by North Korea, suggests that his earlier decision was a political

expedient--"aimed [more at] wooing voters in America rather than improving relations abroad."<sup>46</sup> After winning the Presidency, candidate Carter was simply too inexperienced and too obstinate to surrender the conduct of American foreign policy to President Carter.<sup>47</sup> However, given that he chose to suspend troop withdrawals, only suppositions can be offered as to whether war would have occurred had Carter continued the withdrawals as planned. Although Carter admitted as late as 1985 that he had "never comprehended fully" the revision of North Korea's troop strength,<sup>48</sup> his understanding was sufficient enough to cause him to reverse his decision and leave combat troops in South Korea.

Jimmy Carter had no significant experience in foreign affairs before announcing his candidacy for President in 1975.<sup>49</sup> He had only begun to study the area with any great detail in 1972 after privately deciding to seek the office.<sup>50</sup> It is therefore proper to conclude that his lack of experience in foreign policy was a handicap early in his administration. But, his lack of experience would have been less debilitating upon his decision to withdraw the troops had he not effected so strong a nexus between troop withdrawals and human rights. In choosing to "substitute symbolism and rhetoric--about human ights--for the traditional tools of diplomacy"<sup>51</sup> while in the same breath discussing the need to withdraw the troops, he further encumbered the policymaking process. A more experienced statesman would have been astute enough to divorce the issues

and then seek separate means for achieving desired objectives. Such coupling of human rights and troops withdrawals obfuscated Carter's ability to see and understand the consequences of the cascading effects of his plan. Since the repressive measures of the Park regime were not as a result of American forces being in South Korea, it was, therefore, a *non sequitur* to expect their removal or threat of removal to be effective in producing a more egalitarian response from Park. But, it was correct to expect the third order of effect, trepidation on the part of other regional allies about their security. With his proverbial mixing of apples and oranges, Carter achieved neither troop withdrawals nor a change in Park's repressive rule. If anything, the withdrawal gave the appearance that Park was being punished for his human rights violations and, the specter of increased instability on the peninsula, in light of Carter's decision, provided Park an opportunity to become even more repressive--in the interest of national security.

An additional element of exacerbation was Carter's inveterated commitment--bordering on obstinacy--to seek and follow his own counsel with little regard for requisite diplomatic accords, indispensable consultations, needful compromise, and accommodation of opposing viewpoints. Adding these impediments to his disdain for the over reliance on military power as a means of supporting America's strategic interests in Northeast Asia, produced a policy untenable in execution. While he had correctly identified a repressive

regime, and was correct in hoping to cause improvements, he failed to fully appreciate the intricacies of the strategic environment in which he operated. In doing so, he erred in not making troop withdrawals and human rights distinct objectives. Throughout his tenure as President, Carter never developed strategic foreign policy objectives,<sup>52</sup> that in total, approximated a strategic vision. And, it was a lack of such vision for the strategic role of United States troops in Korea--in support of United States long term interest--that doomed his first foreign policy initiative to failure.

The Korean War drastically changed U.S. policy toward Korea. Korea, which had been of peripheral interest in U.S. foreign policy making, suddenly became a most vital place in the world. Traditionally Western Europe had been the only vital area for American policy makers until the outbreak of the Korean War, although this policy was sustained by some "Europe Firsters" and allies in Europe even during the Korean War....A communized Korea would threaten the security of Japan and the United States would lose a foothold [prestige] in mainland Asia....Truman surely did not wish to be accused by the Republicans of losing South Korea to the Communists.<sup>53</sup>

The United States vital interest in Northeast Asia has not changed since its intervention at the beginning of the Korean War. Deriving its genesis from the policy of containment against the communist threat, "the official U.S. policy holds that regional stability is a principal American security objective for all of East Asia."<sup>54</sup> However, a by-product of being involved in East Asia's defense for such an extended period has been the development and growth of trading partners. While two-way trade with South Korea

totaled \$29 billion for the first nine months of 1991, with the United States running a deficit of more than \$1 billion,<sup>55</sup> two-way trade with all of Northeast Asia (\$310 billion) now exceeds U.S. two-way trade with all of Europe by more than \$70 billion.<sup>56</sup> Apropos to the tenets of America's Open Door policy for China in the early part of this century and the region's trade potential, it has never been the interest of the United States to permit any one country to develop a hegemony in the region. And, given the particular security problem North Korea poses for South Korea, the U.S. maintains specific bilateral security objectives with South Korea designed to:

- \* deter North Korean aggression or defeat it if deterrence fails;
- \* reduce political and military tensions on the peninsula by encouraging North-South talks and the institution of a confidence building measures (CBM) regime; and
- \* transition U.S. forces on the peninsula from a leading to a supporting role, including some force reductions.<sup>57</sup>

Although some critics--in deference to the changes in regional military, political, and economical relationships--are calling for the United States "to evolve a new security equilibrium...not built around a security framework,"<sup>58</sup> "The United States remains committed to the security of the Republic of Korea as it continues to open its economic and political systems."<sup>59</sup> In sum, Northeast Asia is the vortex for six of the world's largest military powers, and it has been an enduring strategic policy of successive generations of U.S. policymakers to retain a combat presence in Northeast

Asia in general and, given Kim Il Sung's belligerence, on South Korean soil in particular.

Since the outbreak of the Korean War the Korean peninsula has remained one of the world's most heavily armed regions (See Appendix A). At the time of the Carter decision, the combined standing armies of the North and South totaled in excess of 2.6 million fighting men, backed by more than 3.6 million in paramilitary forces.<sup>60</sup> A 1978 congressional study on the military balance stated that the relationship between relative war fighting capabilities and deterrence was so mystifying and ambiguous that no reason could be offered for the fact that North Korea had not already attacked the South.<sup>61</sup>

In part, the reason(s) for Kim Il Sung's restraint over the years may have been espoused in Park's 1977 New Year's message--a message whose tenets have been repeated by successive South Korean leaders:

It seems that North Korea believes that once the United States troops are gone, everything will work out fine overnight in its favor. It is about time for North Korea to realize this is only an illusion and fantasy. In the past decade or so, we have persevered under all kinds of adverse circumstances to survive and build up our national strength. We have done so because we knew our adversaries to be the North Korean communists, bent on reckless schemes for the communization of the whole of Korea. We hope the North Korean communists will take due note of this fact and make no miscalculations about our determination and preparedness.<sup>62</sup>

In acknowledging that his administration was spending more than six percent<sup>63</sup> of his country's gross national product

(GNP) on defense. Park defended his actions by stating "the time had already passed when we're dependent on others for our national defense and we should defend our land and steer our fate by ourselves."<sup>64</sup>

A more recent assessment indicates that the current balance (Appendix A) is such that the earlier assessment remains valid.<sup>65</sup> *Prima facie*, the assessment of the current military balance is almost impossible, but, an examination of the two forces that includes force structures, defense budgets, weapons, battle scenarios, leadership, and training does provide a basis on which conclusions can be derived.

South Korean active army membership is in excess of 650,000<sup>66</sup> and remains the sixth largest ground force in the world.<sup>67</sup> Its air and naval forces number more than 100,000. In addition, there is an active ground force reserve--the Homeland Reserve Defense Force--of some 3,500,000 men and a standby reserve force exceeding 1,400,000 men. The South's equipment consists of 2 surface-to-air (SAM) brigades with Hawk and Nike-Hercules battalions; 1800 medium tanks (M-47, M-48A5, M-60, Type 88); 4,000 artillery pieces (up to 206 mm); 30 artillery battalions with Honest John surface-to-surface missiles (SSM); and, 232 combat vessels consisting of destroyers, destroyer escorts, minesweepers, gunboats, and landing ships. The South Korean Air Force has 480 combat aircraft consisting of F-4D/F-4E Phantom II, F-5A, F-5B, F-5E, and F-16C/D.<sup>68</sup> Sophisticated hardware (helicopters, tanks, anti-aircraft rockets, and anti-tank missiles)



provided by the United States through the many years of military assistance programs augments the South Korean military force. All nuclear weapons deployed by the United States were removed from the peninsula in December 1991.<sup>69</sup>

Comparatively, more than 1,000,000 men are estimated to be in the North Korean ground forces. As of 1991, North Korea ranked fifth in the world in the number of men under arms. The North Korean air and naval forces total 111,000. The total number of reserves is unknown but is estimated at 6,200,000. In the highly regimented society of North Korea, credence can be given to the thought that all North Koreans not in the active armed forces are counted among the reserves. The North's military equipment includes 30 artillery brigades with almost 9,000 artillery pieces (up to 170 mm); 3,500 medium tanks; and, an assortment of other artillery weapons (self propelled guns, rocket launchers, FROG SSMs, anti-aircraft guns). Its naval force has approximately 670 vessels consisting of submarines (Soviet W-class, Chinese R-class); patrol boats (Komars with SSMs, Osas with SSMs); subchasers; gunboats; and, torpedo boats. The North Korean air force has over 690 combat aircraft consisting of bombers, MIGs and reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>70</sup>

Premier Kim Il Sung has not been indifferent toward South Korea's military buildup. Since the middle of the 1960s, Kim has been spending huge sums on developing a modern war industry. In 1990, he spent approximately 22 percent of his budget on defense.<sup>71</sup> Over the last 20 years, he

redoubled his efforts to achieve an independent capacity to manufacture key weapons systems so as to make North Korea less dependent on the Soviet Union or China in the event of war. In addition to conventional weapons, the North possesses chemical weapons and production capability for biological weapons; also, the evidence is strong that North Korea has acquired the technology to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>72</sup> Ostensibly, to counter the nuclear threat that the United States affords South Korea. Also, to complement its arsenal of weapons, North Korea has constructed a massive network of underground bases and tunnels in order to harden its defenses against attacks from the air and to provide invasion routes underneath the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

Any comparison of military forces will show the North having a numerical advantage in hardware over the South; but, "considering South Korea's economic power and its efforts toward military buildup (4.3% of GNP in 1991),<sup>73</sup> North Korea's superiority over South Korea in conventional weapons will be reversed in the near future."<sup>74</sup> Regardless, mere bean counting does not allow for the fact that South Korea has a superior ground force that would be operating in very favorable terrain and using equipment technologically superior to the equipment possessed by the North. These factors coupled with an air force capable of achieving and maintaining air superiority make the South a very formidable foe even with the North's numerical advantage.

North Korean military leaders are driven by the imperative to execute a *blitzkrieg* against South Korea that would be capable of achieving strategic and operational objectives before South Korean mobilization and reinforcements from the United States would alter the balance of forces on the peninsula.<sup>75</sup> And as long as the North perceives that United States intervention cannot be prevented regardless of where the forces are stationed, an attack on the South is highly improbable. But, with more than 65 percent of its forces deployed within 15 miles of the DMZ, the North believes it must not repeat the mistakes of the Korean War; the Republic of Korea must be conquered before reinforcements arrive.<sup>76</sup> To counter the *blitzkrieg*, South Korea maintains an offensive deterrence strategy designed to exploit the offensive opportunities created by the fact that the North would use designated attack corridors to channel its main attack forces into the South."<sup>77</sup> While North Korean strategy is designed to force the South to fight three phases of a synchronized campaign simultaneously, the numerical advantage the North possesses in wheeled and armored forces would be channeled somewhat by the South's geography. The southern terrain is dominated--especially in and around the DMZ--by hills and ridges that provide natural barriers against an increasingly more mobile and capable force. However, barring outside intervention, South Korean and United States military planners anticipate that the planned counteroffensive would successfully repel the attack.<sup>78</sup> For

these and other reasons (see Appendix B), militarily, the two Koreas counterbalance each other and only the unilateral upgrading of either country's military forces would substantially alter the balance.

As occurred in the Korean War, one factor that would upset the military balance would be the intervention of allies on the side of North Korea. In the bipolar world of the cold war, the likely allies were thought to be the Soviet Union and or China. But the openness of *glasnost* and the reforms of *perestroika* advocated by former President Mikhail Gorbachev combined with President Roh's *nordopolitik* initiatives--expanded economic and political ties with communist and former communist states and new overtures to the DPRK<sup>79</sup>--gave hope to reduced Soviet intervention on the peninsula even before the demise of the Soviet Union. In fact, the interchange of cultural, educational, and business activities between the Soviet Union and South Korea in the year following the 1988 Olympics--albeit short-lived--gave rise to such high expectations that an analyst described Seoul to be "in a state of euphoria about the Soviet Union."<sup>80</sup> And, the rapprochement established between the United States and China in 1972 was the opportunity the Chinese had coveted since 1948. Accordingly, they are not likely to jeopardize their position in the new world order of the 1990s unless they perceive an imminent threat to their security as occurred early in the Korean War.

Even before the recent turn of events in the former Soviet Union that has now given rise to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Soviets looked upon Kim as a "hot potato"<sup>81</sup> and kept him at arm's length for fear of being drawn into an unwanted war with the United States. A June 1990 meeting in San Francisco between Gorbachev and Roh proved extremely unsettling to North Korean leaders because they saw "their closest ally openly establish contact with their mortal enemy."<sup>82</sup> The North Korean response to this meeting was to inveigh against the Soviets establishing formal diplomatic relations with South Korea. Although the Soviets disregarded Pyongyang's invectives and established formal diplomatic relations in September 1990, economic necessity undoubtedly made the establishment of formal diplomatic relations a *fait accompli* in the new world order. Even without formal diplomatic intercourse, the two countries traded over \$600 million in 1989<sup>83</sup> and more than \$1 billion was planned for 1990.<sup>84</sup> Notwithstanding, now that the Soviet Union has collapsed, there is little immediate concern within Northeast Asia that the Commonwealth--although still possessing a strategic capability in East Asia--will have the resolve to project enough military force within the next 20 years sufficient to destabilize the region.<sup>85</sup>

In 1974, portending the fall of Vietnam, Kim Il Sung visited Peking reportedly seeking strong indications of Chinese support for an invasion of South Korea. The Chinese rebuffed his solicitation by issuing a joint communique that

stated they basically backed his policy toward South Korea in general terms but favored "peaceful reunification."<sup>86</sup>

Although the Chinese, for the record, recognized the DPRK as the only legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula, in recent years Beijing has increased its diplomatic and business contacts with South Korea.<sup>87</sup> "China-South Korean trade has been greater than China-North Korean trade for several years. Trade between the two countries in 1990 exceeded \$3 billion and is expected to increase significantly as China and South Korea have exchanged trade offices."<sup>88</sup> And, in another important sign of the improved relations between the Chinese and South Koreans, "the [Chinese] media commentary no longer uncritically repeats all North Korean propaganda or calls for the removal of U.S. troops from South Korea"<sup>89</sup> Soviet and Chinese participation in the 1988 Olympics in Seoul was seen by South Koreans as support of their government against North Korea.<sup>90</sup> Even a more recent visit to China by Kim seeking economic aid resulted only in a "hearty welcome" and subtle pressure to "take a more flexible approach to the outside world."<sup>91</sup> It was also speculated that "Kim was cautioned against continuing his country's efforts to develop a nuclear bomb."<sup>92</sup> Cognizant of the destabilizing effect a war on the peninsula portends for their own strategic and regional interests, indications are that neither the Confederation of Independent States nor China is interested in a new conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

While the United States national security objectives in South Korea were primarily centered on deterring against a North Korean invasion, the military strategy to accomplish this objective, dictated largely by time-distance factors, has been to forward deploy combat forces on a permanent basis in South Korea.<sup>93</sup> But in the 40 plus years since the United States intervened in the Korean War, a new world order has evolved. And, a minority, yet increasingly vocal, segment of Korean society is reminding fellow citizens of the need for Koreans--without the impediment of American troops on their soil--to take ownership of their security.<sup>94</sup> Ever mindful of the changing geopolitical landscape, and in an attempt to reduce tension between each other toward eventually normalizing relations, both North Korea and the United States have talked with each other for four years through the political counselor at the United States Embassy in Beijing.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, with the passage of the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, the Congress recognized that our military forces deployed for the defense of South Korea needed to be re-evaluated and asked the President to conduct an assessment.<sup>96</sup>

In response, the Bush administration, acknowledging the prodigious progress South Korea has made in rebuilding its economic and military strength since the end of the Korean War, has proposed a significant reduction in the number of U.S. troops on the peninsula by year 2000.

Unlike the Carter Plan, the Bush Plan was not presented as a

unilateral *fait accompli* and is a well-reasoned and thoughtful Department of Defense study, seven months in development. The Plan enjoys bipartisan Congressional support and an acceptance among Asian allies that evolving geopolitical arrangements and economic concerns at home do necessitate changes in how future United States forces are to be deployed in support of United States national interests throughout the Asian Pacific Rim. It envisions a strategic framework for ensuring regional stability into the 21st Century and beyond. In Korea in particular, the plan proposes that "the United States--without acting precipitously, always taking into account the military balance on the peninsula--will drawdown its ground presence and modify command structures so as to transition from a leading to a supporting role."<sup>97</sup> Economically, the plan will permit a considerable portion of the \$2.4 billion<sup>98</sup> currently spent to keep the Army's Second Infantry Division on the peninsula to be reapportioned for other requirements. In an era of diminishing economic resources and shrinking defense budgets, such savings are not minor consequences. In sum, it encompasses the following tenets:

- \* the United States security role on the Korean Peninsula shall switch from a leading role to a supporting one;

- \* United States forces will be partially reduced in three stages;

- \* the Korean government should bear more direct costs of United States armed forces stationed in Korea; and,

- \* Korea should shoulder its own security responsibility as the United States assumes the role of



regional stabilizer rather than playing only a deterring role on the peninsula.<sup>99</sup>

Specifically, the scenario is to be implemented accordingly: 1-3 years (1990-92); 3-5 years (1993-95); and, 5-10 years (1996-2000). During the first phase, approximately 7,000 troops (5,000 personnel in ground units and 2,000 administrative personnel in air units) will be withdrawn but in a way not to hinder the United States commitments regarding the security cooperation agreement with South Korea.<sup>100</sup> These troops are expected to come primarily from the reorganization of headquarters elements as well as from a few combat units.<sup>101</sup>

The second phase will involve a major reorganization of units in the Second Infantry Division but in a way not to convey a misconception that Washington is pulling out of its war-deterrent capabilities from the region.<sup>102</sup> "However, alarmed that North Korea is moving ahead rapidly to develop nuclear weapons," second phase withdrawals were put on hold by Secretary of Defense Cheney in December 1991 and will remain suspended "until the United States is satisfied that North Korea has given up its quest for nuclear arms."<sup>103</sup>

Assuming the first two phases will proceed as planned, the third stage will be completed by the year 2000 and will leave in place a fixed minimum level of United States forces necessary to deter against war.<sup>104</sup> By this time, South Korean troops are expected to play the leading role with United States forces in support.<sup>105</sup> This change in strategy, by necessity, will require the United States to project its

regional presence through an increase in the deployment of air and sea forces while maintaining the ability to re-enter the peninsula at the outbreak of hostilities with a large contingent of land forces.

In a recently concluded study of how Northeast Asians view their security in the 1990s, the need for the United States to keep a fixed, land-based force somewhere in the region was of paramount importance in the minds of regional defense officials<sup>106</sup> for it would demonstrate United States resolve to remain "the regional balancer, honest broker, and ultimate security guarantor."<sup>107</sup> Although the study inferred that the actual size and location of the force were of secondary importance as long as the commitment was long-term, it did conclude that a "brigade or larger Army force" stationed--preferably in South Korea--somewhere in Northeast Asia would be "one of the most effective ways for the United States to demonstrate its lasting commitment to stability in Northeast Asia and its intention to remain engaged in the affairs of the region."<sup>108</sup> The significant difference in mission between current United States forces stationed in South Korea and a future force would be that the future force would assume a regional mission of responding to any exigency in Northeast Asia, rather than maintaining a primary mission of deterring against a North Korean invasion of South Korea.

Deploying a smaller American force in South Korea with a regional rather than peninsula mission would probably necessitate changes in the current Status of Forces

Agreement. Assuming an American force in a supporting role would be considered less important to South Korean security needs and, therefore, perceived with diminished status by South Korean authorities, United States policymakers would need to be particularly circumspect in ensuring Americans were not disadvantaged or their legal rights abridged by Korean authorities in light of a change in military mission.

## CONCLUSIONS

Having made an empiric campaign promise designed to woo voters away from the Republican Party and get himself elected in the aftermath of Watergate and Vietnam, Jimmy Carter remained morally committed to withdrawing ground combat troops from South Korea for two and one-half years after taking office--even when his most experienced senior advisors offered compelling evidence that the military situation in Korea did not support a fulfillment of his campaign promise. While the facts were sufficient long before July 1979, being disposed toward obstinacy, Carter was not inclined to admit his decision was wrong. He was persuaded to suspend the withdrawal only after a CIA study indicated that previous estimates of North Korean forces were understated by at least 30 percent<sup>109</sup> and that a withdrawal in the face of a numerically superior and offensively deployed North Korean enemy would indeed have a destabilizing effect on the region and therefore be in contravention of long-term United States interests in Northeast Asia.

Tempered by deep Christian beliefs, Carter sought "to emphasize the moral values of human rights and democracy in dealing with other nations."<sup>110</sup> For him, the American commitment in Korea was a perfect example of what had gone wrong with United States foreign policy in previous administrations--"an excessive reliance on American armed

forces and complicity with a morally repugnant regime"<sup>111</sup>— and he was committed to correcting it. Aware that the Nixon-Ford Administration had been less than zealous against the Park regime in advocating for human rights, Carter attempted to use his crusade for human rights both as a means of distancing himself from the previous administration and as a means of forcing Park's hand in lessening his repressive measures. Such a focus, however, obscured important geopolitical realities and blurred his vision.

In concomitantly advocating for human rights and troop withdrawals, he lost sight of the fact that American troops had been stationed in Korea since 1953 to demonstrate United States resolve to contain Soviet expansion and deter against a North Korean invasion. The fact that the Park regime came later and chose to institute repressive measures was a separate and distinct consequence of sovereign politics.

It would have been more appropriate to have presented his plan as a demand for North Korea to reduce tensions on the peninsula as a prerequisite for, not a consequence of, phased troop withdrawals.<sup>112</sup> Extracting such a *quid pro quo* from North Korea would have weakened considerably Park's argument for continuing repressive measures under martial law while also providing for a military situation more conducive to troop withdrawals. In choosing to parallel his objectives, Carter achieved neither a renunciation of Park's repressive policies nor troop withdrawals.

Through its support of Kim Il Sung, the Soviet Union maintained an ingress into the region and, therefore, however infeasible the theory of containment, such doctrine required that the United States also remain in the region to counter the Soviet threat. Accordingly, in a bi-polar world of "zero sum" relationships, the fact that the Soviets would have remained in light of a United States departure equated to a loss of America's ability to maintain stability in the region and would have posed serious questions in the minds of other East Asian allies about the United States commitment to their security.

While Jimmy Carter was not the first to assume office without prior experience in foreign affairs, unlike many of his predecessors, he never developed a strategic vision that defined an over-arching national interest--except to state "American foreign policy should be based on the democratic idealism of Jefferson and Wilson ... that peace, human rights, self-determination, and cooperation were paramount."<sup>113</sup> Therefore, an (expected) outcome of that deficiency was disjointed, shallow, and inconsistent policies--sometimes confusing our allies and foes alike. But while he did achieve success, e.g. the Camp David agreement, Panama Canal treaties, establishment of diplomatic relations with China, and SALT II,<sup>114</sup> his Koreanization Plan was a failure.

Events of recent years have brought about epochal changes in East-West relations. The demise of the Soviet

Union and the recognition of China as a country--albeit a communist state--with which the United States could effect full diplomatic relations have greatly lessen the need to worry about containing communistic expansion and domination in Northeast Asia. While Kim Il Sung remains the major military threat to South Korean security, he has lost his major sponsor and is becoming increasingly isolated in his efforts to pose the threat he was able to project in the mid-70s. Considering the recent admission of both Koreas into the United Nations and the signing of a non-aggression agreement between the two countries in December 1991, it is reasonable to expect that President Roh's *nordpoltict* will lead to more a fruitful North-South dialogue that, at a minimum, would end the hostilities and allow for official recognition of each country's sovereign right to exist. At the very best, *nordpoltict* could achieve peaceful reunification of the peninsula.

Notwithstanding the optimism for peaceful accommodation, the tremendous growth and modernization that has occurred within South Korea's armed forces since 1953 now makes it an imperative for the Republic of Korea to take the lead in providing for its defense. The Bush Plan recognizes that such responsibility is expedient and provides for a reasoned means of withdrawal. Given that elements within the world's political environment have changed significantly since the 1970s, with previous constraints no longer operative, the

Bush Plan, unlike the Carter Plan, will achieve the desired results.



## APPENDIX A

### NORTH and SOUTH KOREAN ARMED FORCES

	<u>North Korea</u>	<u>South Korea</u>
Military Budget (\$ in Billions)	\$5	\$11
Total Active Forces (000s)	1,206	655
Total Mobilization Forces (000s)	6,200	5,250
<b>Army</b>		
Active Personnel (000s)	1,066	550
Division Equivalent (Active/Reserve)	25/18	23/-
Medium Tanks	3,500	1,800
Other Armored Vehicles	4,000	1,750
Field Artillery	8,400	4,000
Multiple Rocket Launchers	2,400	114
Surface-to-Surface Missiles	54	24
Antiaircraft Artillery	8,800	600
Surface-to-Air Missile (Sites/Missiles)	54/800	34/250
<b>Air Force</b>		
Bombers/Fighters	694	480
Transports	250	34
Helicopters	170	280
<b>Navy</b>		
Submarines	24	1
Carriers	0	0
Destroyers, Frigates, Corvettes	3	36
Missile Attack	39	11
Coastal, Mine, Amphibious	605	184

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, December 1991 as printed in Armed Forces Journal International, February 1992, 38.

## APPENDIX B

### KEY INDICATORS of the MILITARY BALANCE BETWEEN NORTH and SOUTH KOREA

North Korea's advantages are in the following areas:

- Large numbers of tanks (although not the latest Soviet models);
- Large numbers of artillery pieces, mortars, and rocket launchers;
- An extensive air defense system with large numbers of weapons;
- Greater numbers of, but less capable, tactical aircraft; and
- Extensive unconventional warfare (commando) forces.

South Korea's strengths are:

- Superior ground force manpower, particularly with respect to division staying power and reserves;
- Superior technical capability in tactical aircraft, antitank guided missiles, and tanks;
- Prepared defensive positions on advantageous terrain; and,
- It's alliance with the United States.

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SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office, Force Planning and Budgetary Implications of U.S. Withdrawal from Korea, May 1978, 34.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>87</sup>Korea and World Affairs, Fall 1991: 274.
- <sup>88</sup>Army, 118.
- <sup>89</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>90</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup>Nicholas D. Kristof, "Top North Korean Calls on Beijing," The New York Times, 15 Oct. 1991: A6.
- <sup>92</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>93</sup>Framework, 2.
- <sup>94</sup>Northeast Asian Security, 79.
- <sup>95</sup>"Gush Warns," A1.
- <sup>96</sup>U.S. Congress, Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P. L. 101-189, Sec. 915, 101st Congress, 1st Session, 1989, as printed in U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News, Book 1, 1st Session, 1989, 103 Stat. 1528-29, 29 Nov. 1989.
- <sup>97</sup>Framework, 7-9.
- <sup>98</sup>"Goodbye in Asia," 38.
- <sup>99</sup>Korea and World Affairs, Fall 1991, 462.
- <sup>100</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>101</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>103</sup>William Matthews, "U.S. Postpones Korean Troop Withdrawals," Army Times, 2 Dec. 1991, 7.
- <sup>104</sup>Northeast Asian Security, xi.
- <sup>105</sup>Framework, 5.
- <sup>106</sup>Politics, 135.
- <sup>107</sup>Korea and World Affairs, Fall 1991, 463.
- <sup>108</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>109</sup>Hard Choices, 129.
- <sup>110</sup>Jimmy Carter as President, 113.



<sup>111</sup>Morality, 103.

<sup>112</sup>America's Commitment, 159.

<sup>113</sup>Jimmy Carter as President, 111-112.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 122.

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